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(54) **CONTAINMENT TUBES AND IMAGING SYSTEMS EMPLOYING SAME**

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A61B 6/4423 (2013.01); **A61G 10/00**
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(2013.01); **A61B 2019/083** (2013.01)

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USPC 600/407, 410, 411, 415, 421, 424;
324/318–322
See application file for complete search history.

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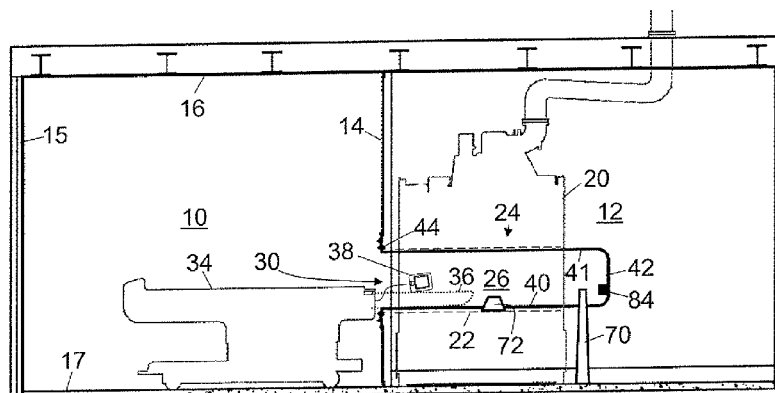
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Primary Examiner — Rochelle Turchen

(57) **ABSTRACT**

An isolation system with imaging or radiation therapy capability is disclosed. At least one containment barrier (14, 15, 16, 17) defines an isolation region (10). An imaging or therapy system (20) is disposed outside of the isolation region. The containment barrier includes a substantially hollow tubular extension (24, 42, 44, 124, 224, 324) protruding away from the isolation region (10). The substantially hollow tubular extension surrounds an interior volume (26) that is in fluid communication with the isolation region and is in fluid isolation from the imaging or therapy system. The substantially hollow tubular extension is made at least partially of a material providing operative communication between the imaging or therapy system and the interior volume of the substantially hollow tubular extension.

24 Claims, 14 Drawing Sheets



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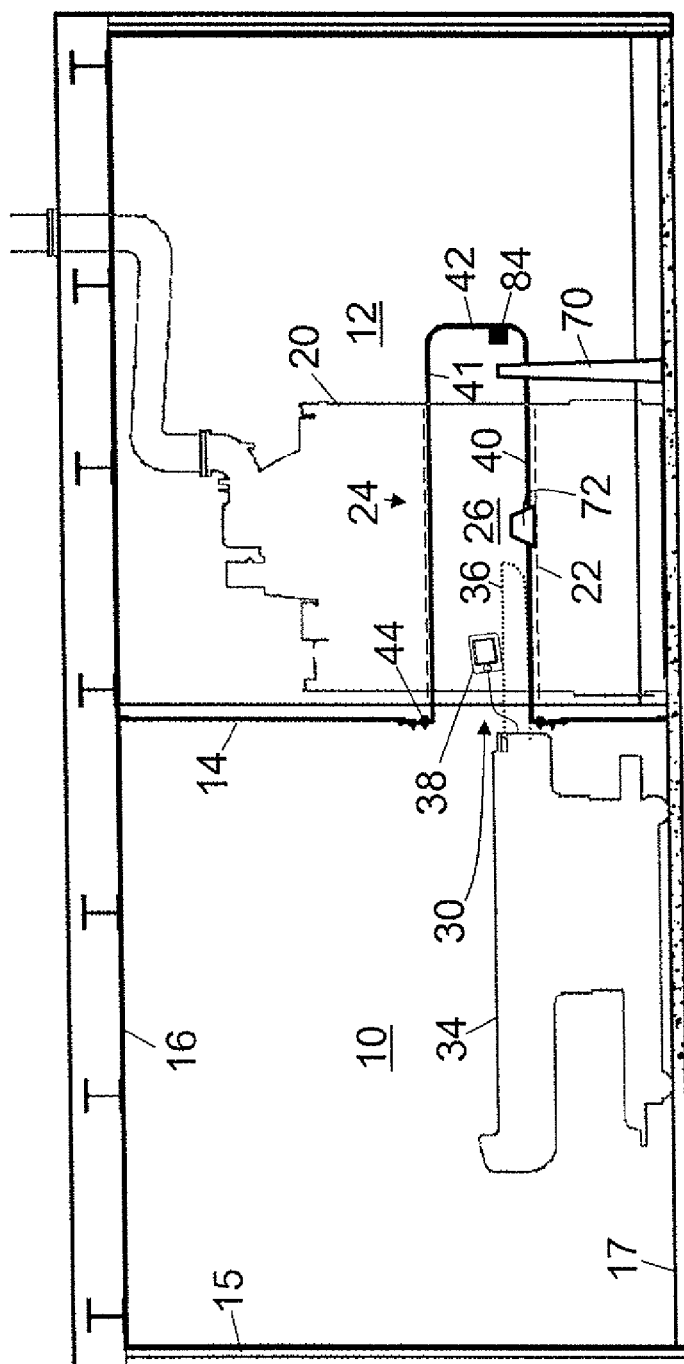


Fig. 1

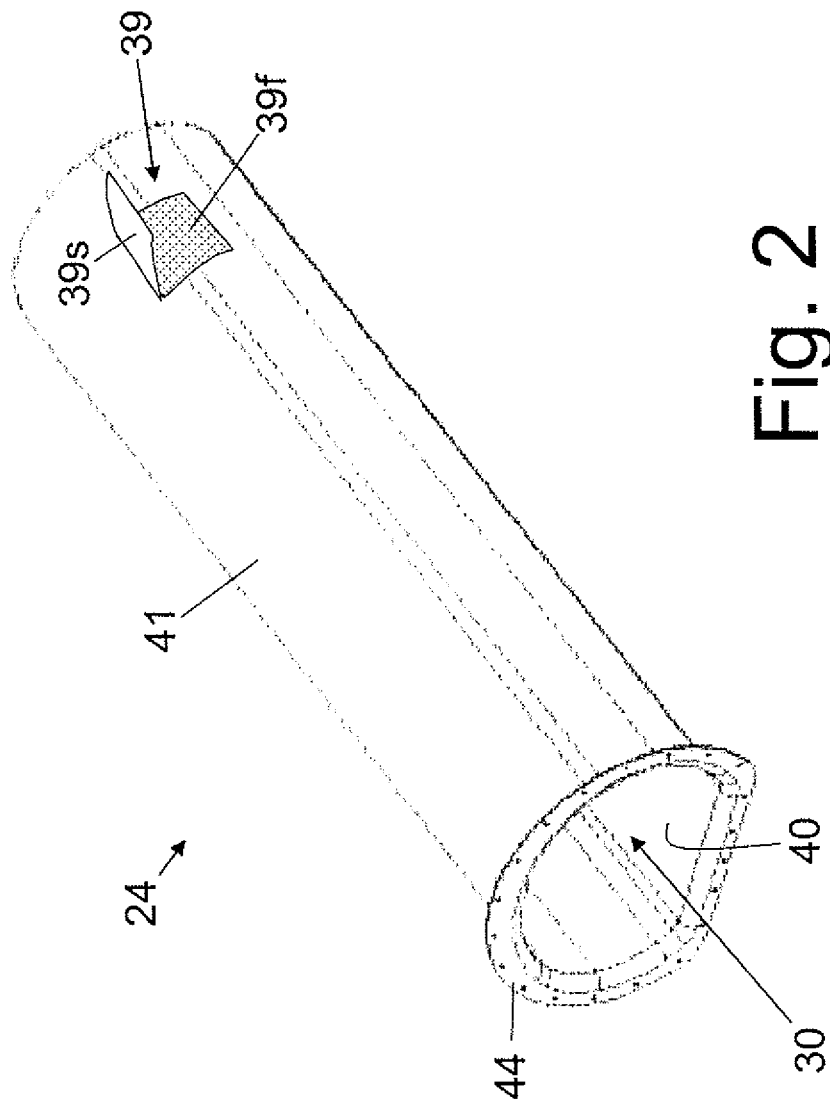


Fig. 2

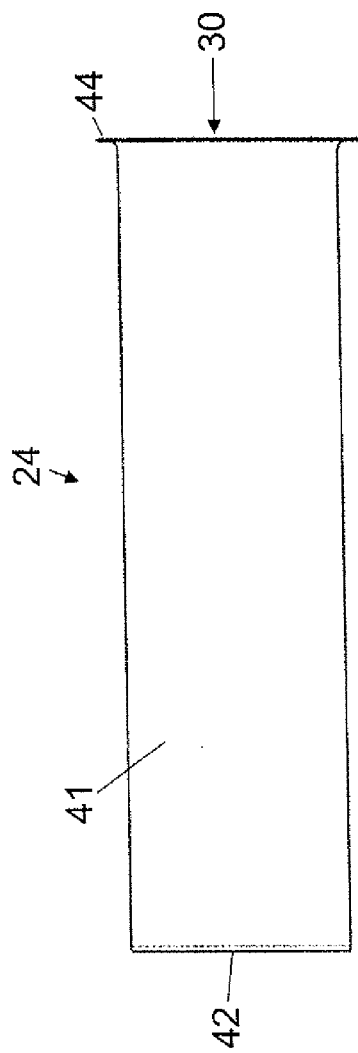


Fig. 3

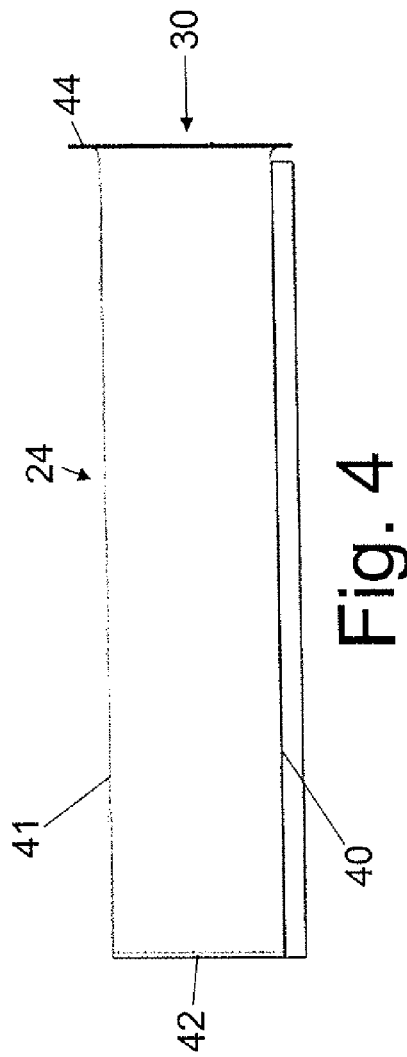


Fig. 4

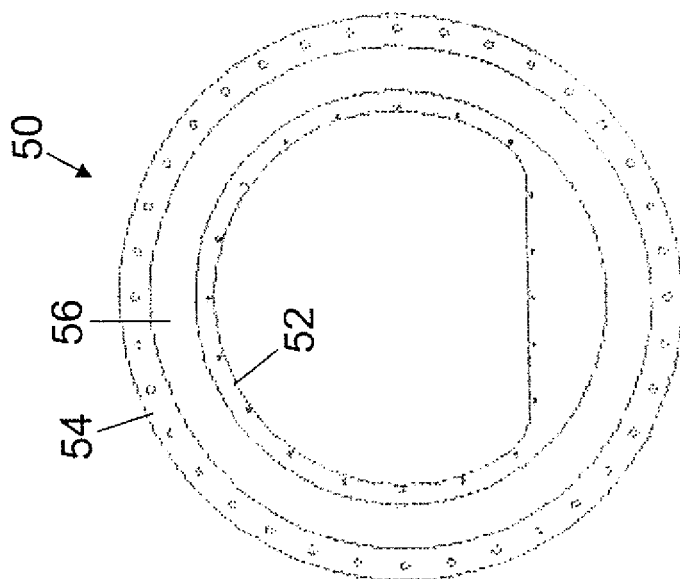


Fig. 6

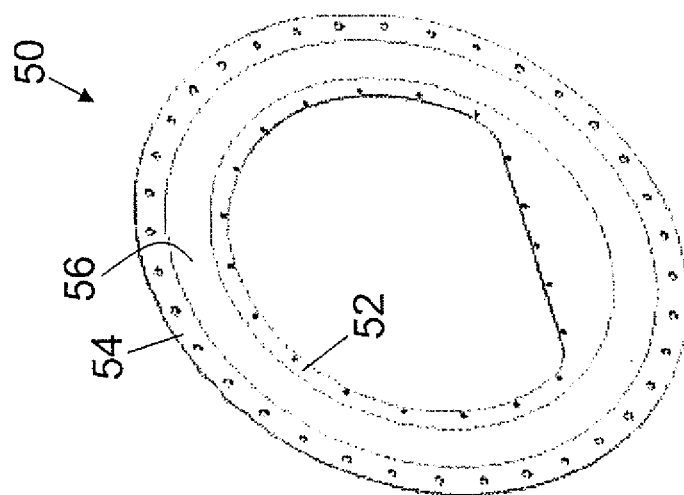
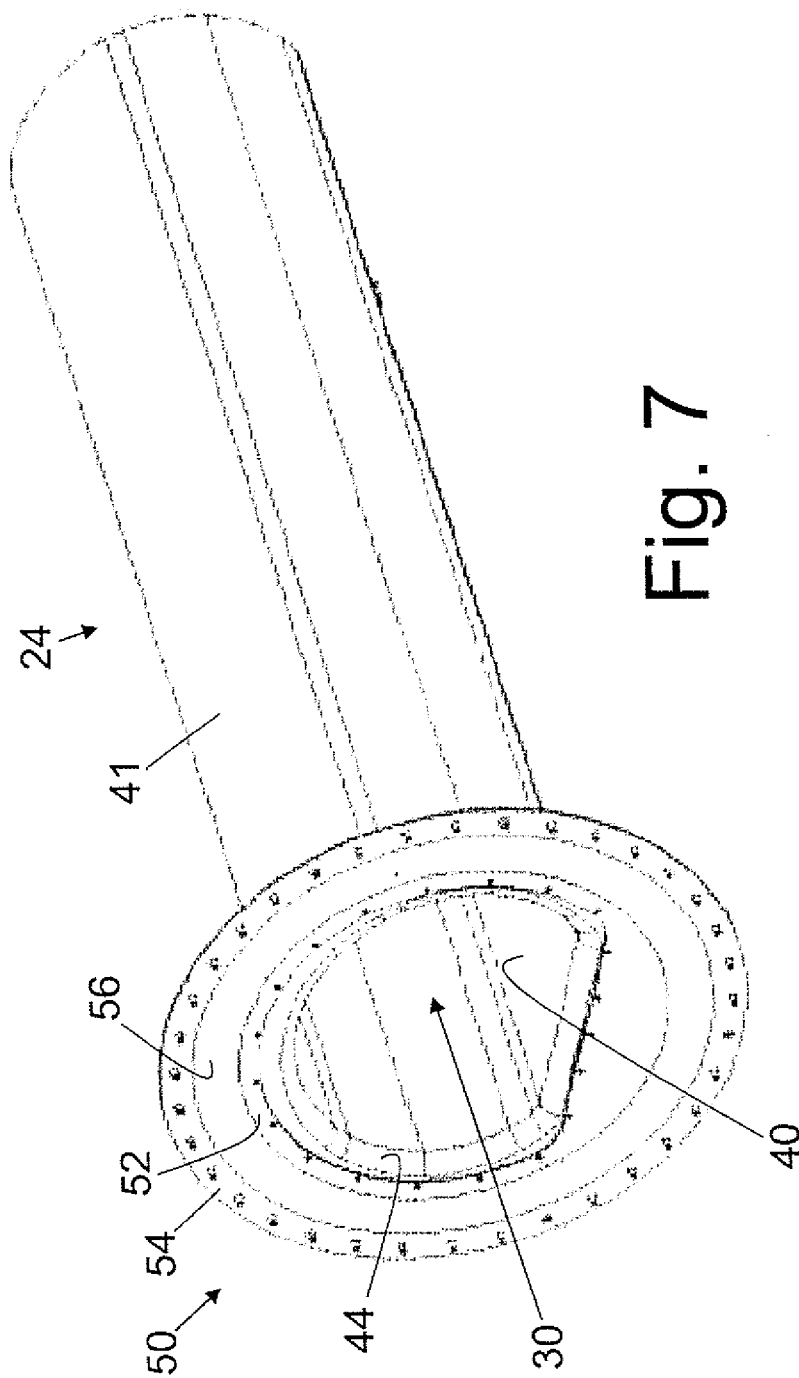


Fig. 5



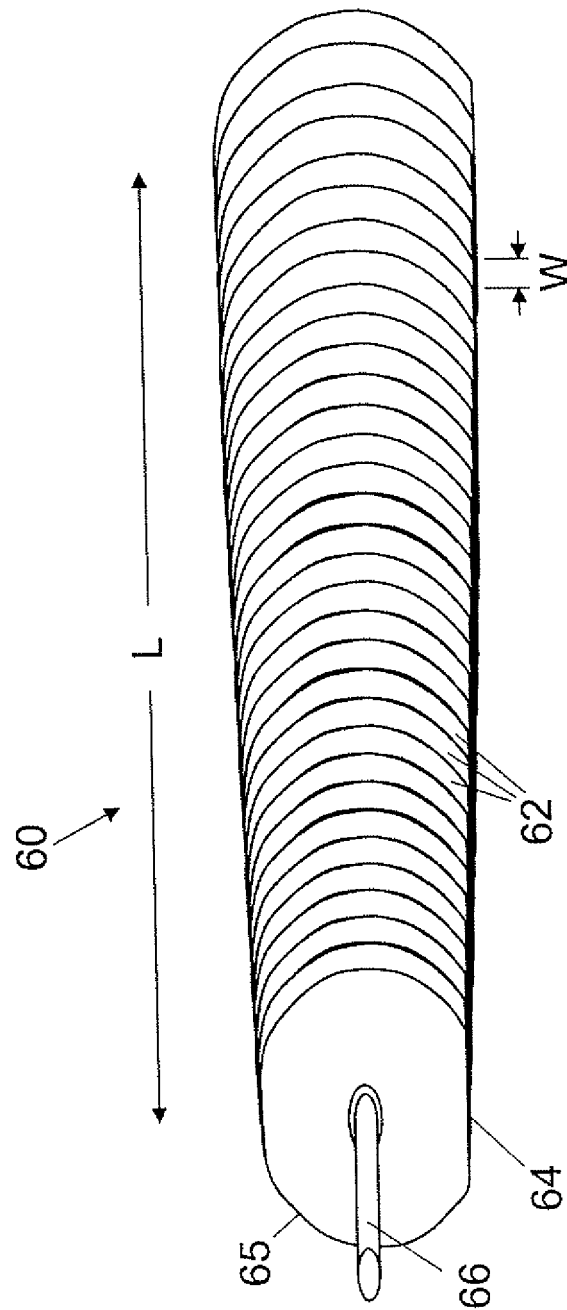


Fig. 8

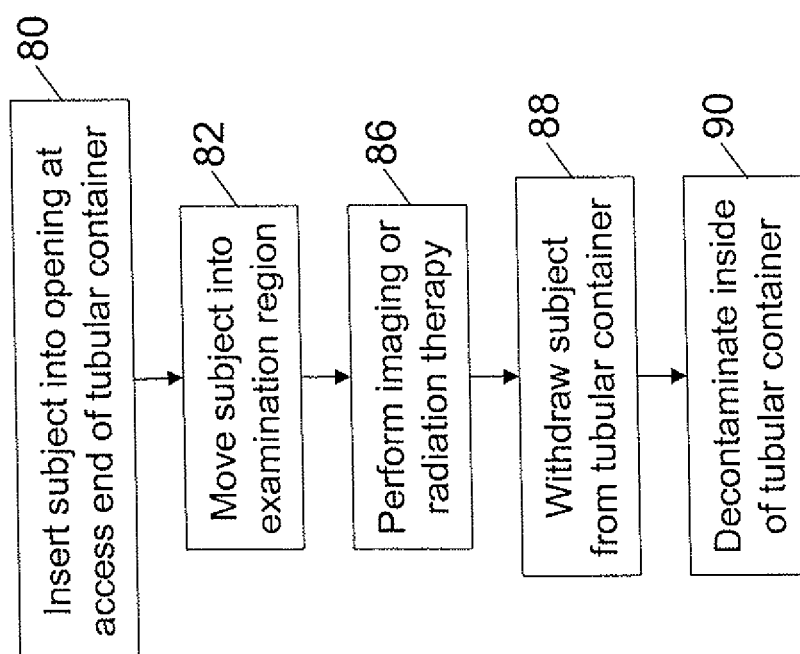


Fig. 9

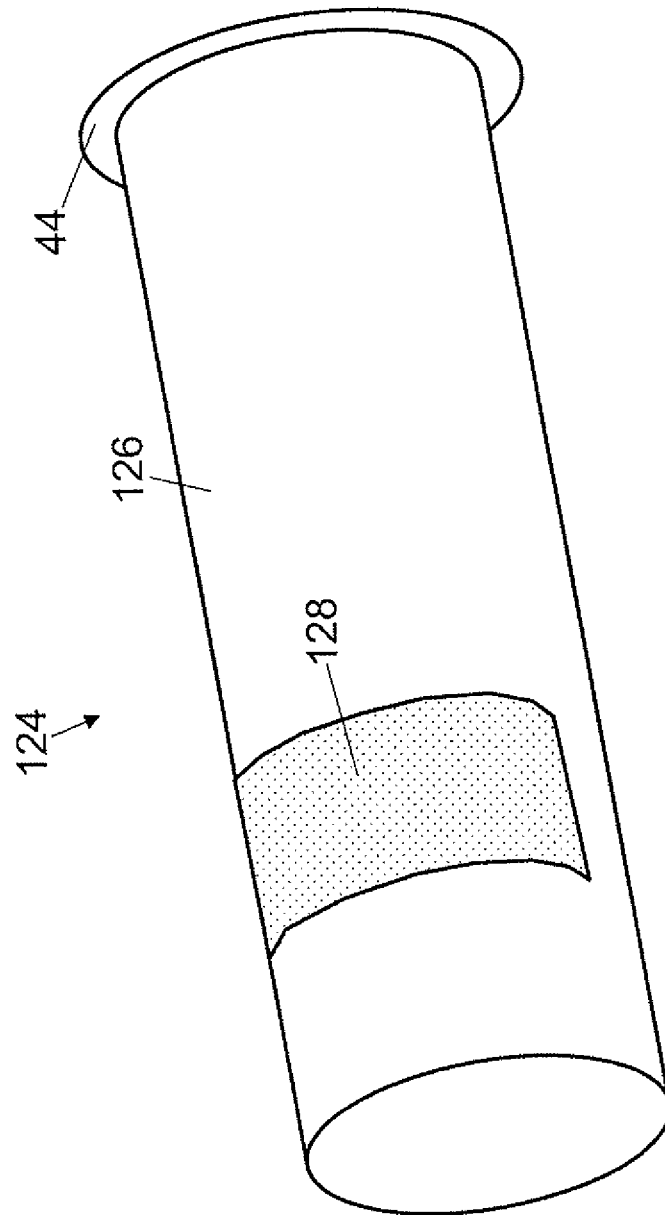


Fig. 10

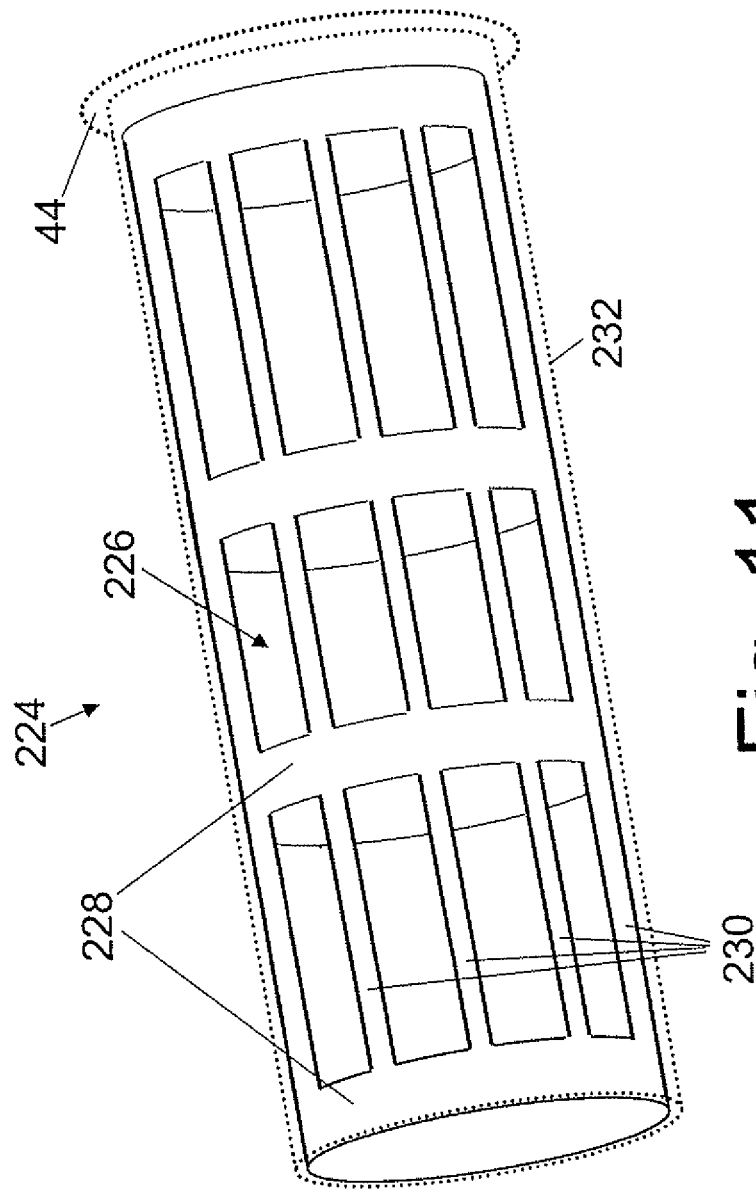


Fig. 11

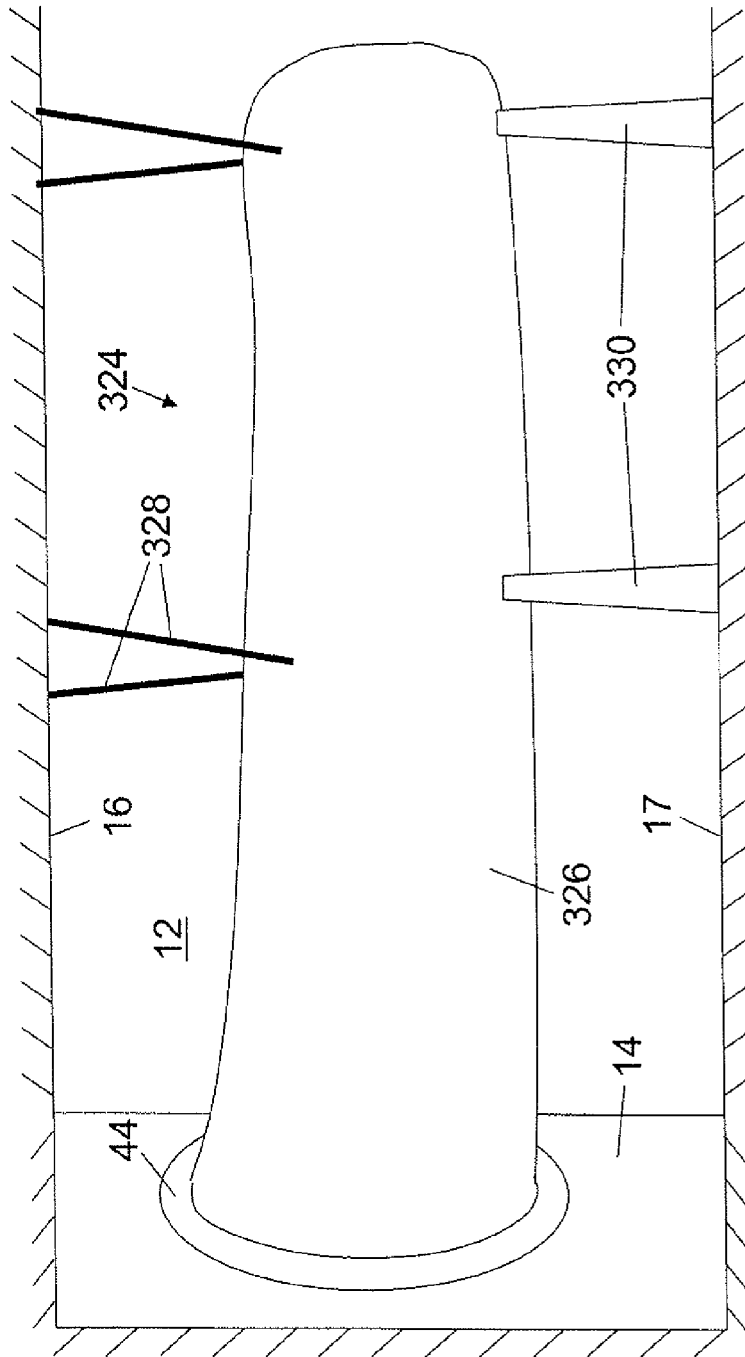


Fig. 12

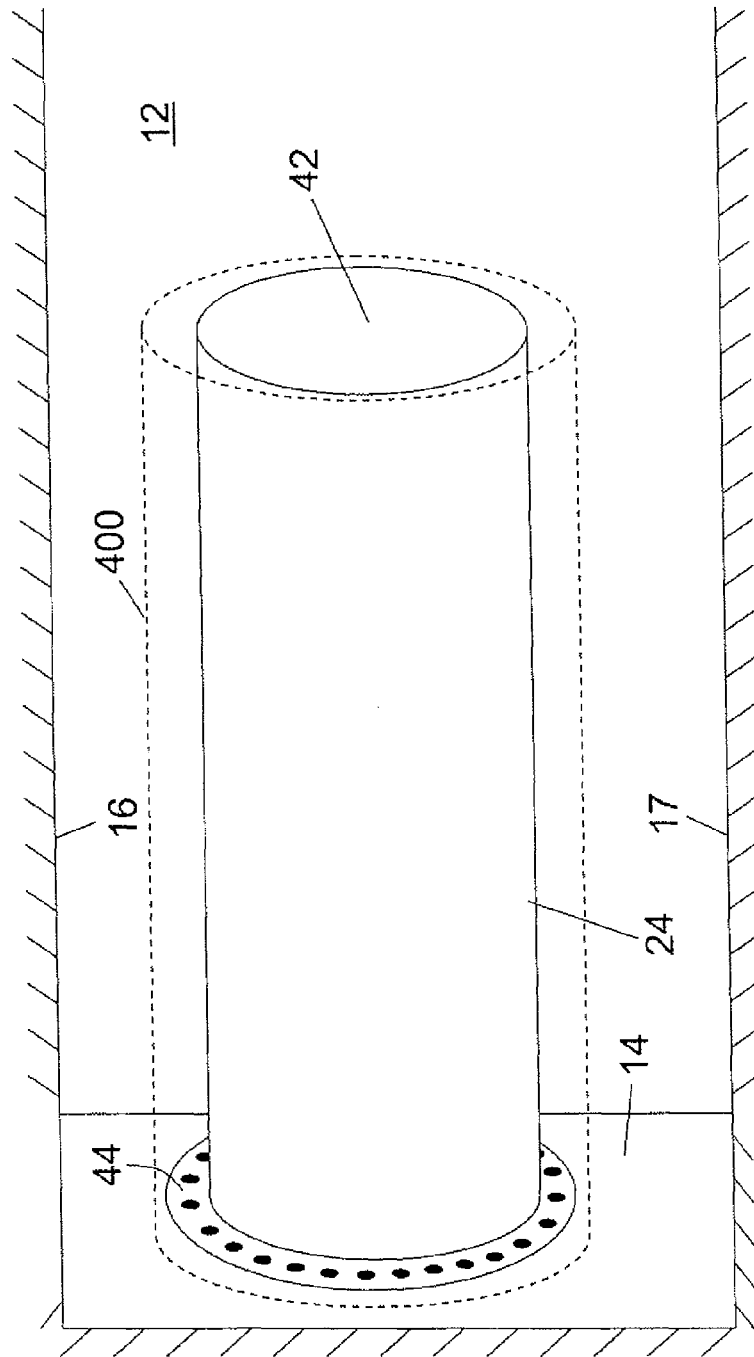


Fig. 13

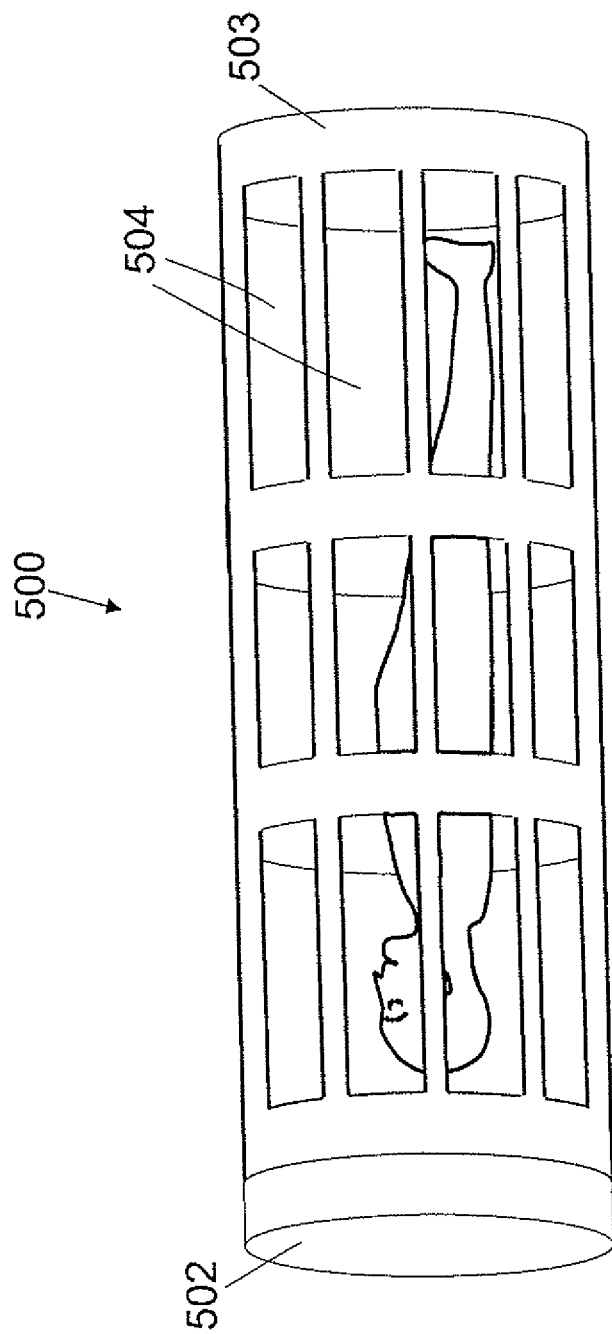


Fig. 14

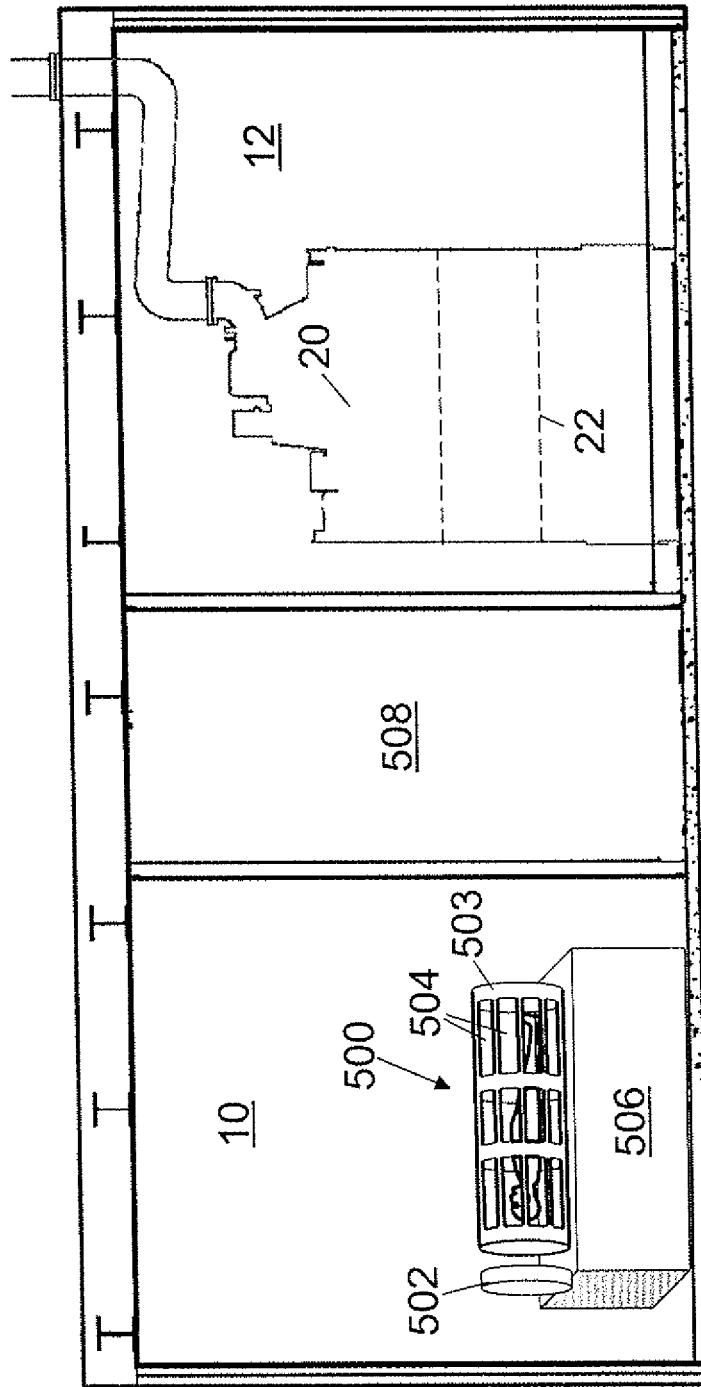


Fig. 15

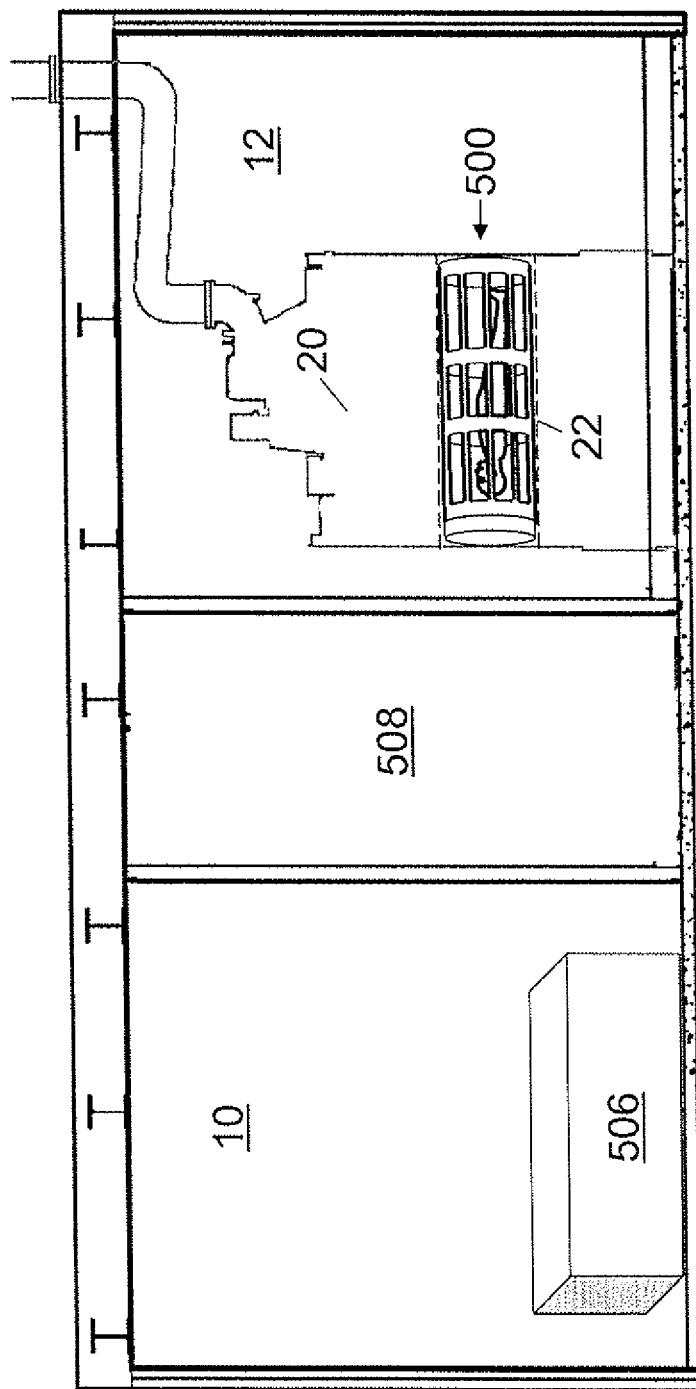


Fig. 16

CONTAINMENT TUBES AND IMAGING SYSTEMS EMPLOYING SAME

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a Continuation of International Application No. PCT/IB2006/053523 filed Sep. 27, 2006 which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/803,754 filed Jun. 2, 2006 and of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/596,475 filed Sep. 27, 2005.

This invention was made with Government support under grant no. N01-AO-60001 awarded by the National Institutes of Health (NI). The Government has certain rights in this invention.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The following relates to the environmental arts, and to the imaging, diagnostic, characterization, and related arts. It finds particular application in diagnostic imaging of medical test subjects in biological isolation environments, and is described with particular reference thereto. However, the following finds more general application in imaging of subjects of substantially any type in substantially any isolation environment, and finds still more general application in enabling access to subjects in substantially any isolation environment for substantially any imaging, diagnostic, characterization, or other purpose without breaking the isolation and without exposing the imaging, diagnostic, characterization, or other equipment to the isolation environment.

Concerns about bioterrorism, spread of contagions by travel, and so forth have motivated development and expansion of biological isolation laboratories for research, diagnosis and monitoring of contagion outbreaks, and so forth. Dangerous infectious diseases are advantageously studied in laboratories operating at Biological Safety Level 4 (BSL-4) or in accordance with other biological safety protocols such as those specified in the BioSafety in Molecular and Biomedical Laboratories (BMBL) standard issued by the Office of Health and Safety of the Centers for Disease Control (BMBL 4th edition available at <http://www.cdc.gov/od/ohs/biosfty/bmb14/bmb14toc.htm>). As noted in the introduction of the BMBL, "Microbiological laboratories are special, often unique work environments that may pose identifiable infectious disease risks to persons in or near them. Infections have been contracted in the laboratory throughout the history of microbiology." These laboratories are specially designed and constructed for containment. A typical BSL-4 laboratory is made gas-tight and coated with a thick epoxy seal on walls, floors, and ceilings, and is typically housed in a double-walled concrete structure with limited access. Mechanical systems are specially designed with redundancies and to maintain a bioseal. BSL-4 containment is achieved at least in part using a dynamic system of pressure differentials, maintained by surrounding the laboratory horizontally and vertically with a series of increasing pressure zones. Airlocks are used at primary access points. Materials used in a BSL-4 laboratory are selected to withstand exposure to decontamination chemicals such as Microchem and TB Quat, and are further selected to withstand exposure to decontamination gases such as para-formaldehyde, vaporized hydrogen peroxide at relatively high (e.g. 35%) concentration, ammonium carbonate, and so forth.

Medical imaging systems such as magnetic resonance (MR) scanners, gamma cameras, positron emission tomography (PET) scanner, and so forth are advantageously used to

examine test subjects in the course of studying infectious diseases. For example, medical imaging can reveal tumors or other malignancies, can monitor tumor growth rates, and so forth. However, medical imaging systems are expensive, complex systems that are not readily compatible with the BSL-4 environment. For example, a typical medical imaging instrument includes components that are likely to be damaged by chemicals or gases used in decontamination. Medical imaging instruments also typically include materials and structures that have a high likelihood of trapping and retaining infectious agents such as bacteria, viruses, prions, or so forth. Servicing of medical imaging equipment disposed in a BSL-4 environment is also problematic—servicing technicians qualified to perform the maintenance may not be qualified to operate in the BSL-4 environment, and transferring parts into and out of the BSL-4 environment is difficult. Additionally, the isolation suits worn by personnel in the BSL-4 environment reduce manual dexterity and inhibit mobility which further increases the difficulty in maintaining medical imaging equipment in a BSL-4 environment.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one aspect, an apparatus is disclosed, including an imaging or therapy system and a container that is sealed off from the imaging or therapy system and open to an isolation region to admit a subject from the isolation region into the container for imaging or therapy by the imaging or therapy system.

In accordance with one aspect, a subject loading system is disclosed for loading a subject disposed in an isolation region into an imaging or therapy system disposed outside the isolation region. The subject loading system includes a container sized to receive the subject. The container is sealed except for an opening arranged to provide access to an interior of the container from the isolation region. The opening is sized to admit the subject into the interior of the container. The interior of the container is in operative communication with the imaging or therapy system.

In accordance with another aspect, an isolation system with imaging or radiation therapy capability is disclosed. At least one containment barrier defines an isolation region. The imaging or therapy system is disposed outside of the isolation region. The containment barrier includes a substantially hollow tubular extension protruding away from the isolation region and overlapping an examination or processing region of the imaging or therapy system.

In accordance with another aspect, a method is disclosed of manufacturing a tubular member. A plurality of plates are formed having a selected cross-section. The plates are secured together to define a tubular mandrel having the selected cross-section. A filament is wound around the tubular mandrel to define the tubular member. The tubular member is removed from the tubular mandrel.

In accordance with another aspect, a subject loading system is disclosed for loading a subject disposed in an isolation region into an imaging or therapy system disposed outside the isolation region. The subject loading system includes: a tubular member sized to receive the subject, the tubular member formed by the method of the preceding paragraph; a flange disposed at an access end of the tubular member, the flange being sealed to a containment barrier of the isolation region such that the interior volume of the tubular member is accessible from the isolation region; and an endcap member sealing a second end of the tubular member opposite the access end of the tubular member.

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In accordance with another aspect, a mandrel is disclosed for use in manufacturing a tubular member. The mandrel includes a plurality of plates having a selected non circular cross-section. The plates are secured together to define a tubular mandrel having the selected cross-section.

In accordance with another aspect, a subject loading system is disclosed for loading a subject from an isolation region into an imaging or therapy system. The subject loading system includes: a subject loading end; a subject imaging or treatment end; and a containment tube connecting said subject loading end and said subject imaging or treatment end.

In accordance with another aspect, an apparatus is disclosed for imaging or treating an isolated subject. The apparatus includes a tubular structure that contains the subject and separates the subject from an imaging or treatment system used in the imaging or treating.

In accordance with another aspect, an isolation system is disclosed. An isolation region includes a containment barrier. An imaging or radiation therapy system is disposed outside of the isolation region and is configured to perform imaging or radiation therapy of a subject in the isolation region across the containment barrier.

In accordance with another aspect, a subject isolation system is disclosed. A container is sized to receive a human subject. A sealing portion is configured to seal the container with a human subject inside. The container sealed by the sealing portion has an exterior susceptible to decontamination, and is configured for mounting in an imaging or radiation therapy system.

One advantage resides in enabling imaging or radiation therapy of a subject disposed in an isolation region without breaking containment of said isolation region.

Another advantage resides in providing a mechanism for loading and unloading subjects from an isolation region into an imaging or radiation therapy system disposed outside the isolation region, the mechanism being readily decontaminated in accordance with BSL-4 or other protocols followed in the isolation region.

Another advantage resides in facilitating imaging or radiation therapy treatment of a subject disposed in a BSL-4 or other type of isolation region.

Another advantage resides in providing an imaging or radiation therapy system for imaging or treating subjects disposed in an isolation region, in which the imaging or radiation therapy system is disposed outside the isolation region to facilitate maintenance and to avoid placing the imaging or radiation therapy system under the decontamination or sterilization regimen employed in the isolation region.

Another advantage resides in providing a method for manufacturing a tubular member of non-circular cross-section.

Another advantage resides in providing a tubular mandrel of non-circular cross-section for manufacturing a tubular member.

Still further advantages of the present invention will be appreciated to those of ordinary skill in the art upon reading and understand the following detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention may take form in various components and arrangements of components, and in various steps and arrangements of steps. The drawings are only for purposes of illustrating the preferred embodiments and are not to be construed as limiting the invention.

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FIG. 1 diagrammatically shows an isolation region and an imaging system, along with a tubular container extension protruding from a containment barrier into an examination region of the imaging system.

FIGS. 2, 3, and 4 show perspective, top, and side views, respectively, of the tubular container of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 5 and 6 show perspective and front views, respectively, of a gasket for sealing the access opening of the tubular container of FIGS. 2-4 to the containment barrier of the isolation region of FIG. 1.

FIG. 7 shows a perspective view of the tubular container of FIGS. 2-4 with the gasket of FIGS. 5 and 6 attached.

FIG. 8 shows a perspective view of a mandrel for fabricating the tubular container of FIGS. 2-4.

FIG. 9 shows a block diagram of an imaging or radiation therapy process suitably performed by the system of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 10-12 show some alternative tubular containers suitably substituted for the tubular container of FIGS. 2-4 in the system of FIG. 1.

FIG. 13 shows an embodiment of the isolation region FIG. 1 with an additional containment jacket disposed over the tubular container.

FIG. 14 shows a perspective view of a fully sealed container for transporting a subject from the isolation region to the imaging or radiation therapy system.

FIG. 15 shows the container of FIG. 14 disposed in the isolation region during loading of the human subject, before sealing using the removable end cap.

FIG. 16 shows the fully sealed container of FIG. 14 in the less isolated or non-isolated region and in position for imaging or radiation therapy.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

With reference to FIG. 1, an imaging suite, laboratory, or the like is divided into an isolation region 10 and a less isolated or non-isolated region 12. For example, the isolation region 10 may be a "hot" side of a partitioned biological laboratory that is contaminated, or potentially may be contaminated, with a pathogen and hence is maintained in isolation in accordance with the BSL-4 protocol or another biological safety protocol. In such embodiments, the less isolated or non-isolated region 12 may be maintained at a lower isolation level, or may not be subject to any isolation protocols at all. In other embodiments, the isolation region 10 may be contaminated, or susceptible to contamination, by a toxic chemical or radioactive substance, or may be a sterile room or other isolated region that is not contaminated with anything, or so forth. The isolation region 10 is separated from the less isolated or non-isolated region 12 by a containment barrier 14 of the isolation region 12, such as the illustrated containment wall 14, or a containment ceiling, or a containment floor, or so forth. Typically, the isolation region 10 is separated by a plurality of containment barriers such as the wall 14, additional walls 15 (one of which is shown in the diagrammatic side-view of FIG. 1), a ceiling 16, and a floor 17. An airlock or airlocked door (not shown) is provided to enable ingress into and egress out of the isolation region 10 without breaking containment of the isolation region 10. Although the isolation region 10 represents a primary controlled environment, the BSL-4 controlled environment may also be considered as extending into the area outside of the isolation region 10 that is governed by isolation-related protocols such as decontamination procedures or the like.

In an example BSL-4 isolation region 10, the containment barriers 14, 15, 16, 17 are made gas-tight and coated with a thick epoxy seal on walls, floors, and ceilings, and the BSL-4

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level isolation region is typically housed in a double-walled/reinforced concrete structure (not shown in FIG. 1) with limited access. Materials used in the BSL-4 laboratory are selected to withstand exposure to decontamination chemicals such as Microchem and TB Quat, and are further selected to withstand exposure to decontamination gases such as paraformaldehyde, vaporized hydrogen peroxide at relatively high (e.g. 35%) concentration, ammonium carbonate, and so forth. Although described with example reference to an isolation region that is a biological laboratory operating as a BSL-4 environment, the techniques disclosed herein for enabling imaging or radiation therapy of subjects disposed in an isolation region are applicable to substantially any type of isolation region, such as biological laboratories operating at biological safety levels other than BSL-4 such as laboratories operating at other BSL levels and under other biological safety protocols, isolation environments for processing radioactive or toxic materials, sterile isolation environments for processing patients with deficient immune systems, samples intended to remain sterile, and so forth.

An imaging or radiation therapy system 20, such as a magnetic resonance (MR) scanner, a transmission computed tomography (CT) system, a single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) system such as a gamma camera, a positron emission tomography (PET) system, an x-ray system, an ultrasound system, an optical camera, a radiation therapy system, or a combination system such as a SPECT/PET system, a SPECT/CT system, a radiation therapy/CT system, PET/MR, or so forth, is arranged outside the isolation region 10, for example in the less isolated or non-isolated region 12. The imaging or radiation therapy system 20 has an associated examination or processing region, such as for example an examination region contained within a bore 22 (a perimeter of which example bore 22 is indicated by horizontal dashed lines in FIG. 1) of an MR scanner. A subject is disposed in the examination or processing region for imaging or radiation therapy treatment.

An arrangement such as that illustrated in FIG. 1 has diverse uses, such as for example testing of a drug for potentially treating a contagion such as an infectious bacteria, prions, or so forth. In a typical drug testing application, a matrix of test animals having a contagion that is potentially treatable with a drug under study are disposed in the BSL-4 laboratory or other isolation region 10. The isolation region 10 provides a controlled environment for testing of the contagion, and ensures that the contagion does not escape containment to infect surrounding personnel. Some animals of the matrix receive the drug under study, while others receive a lesser or greater dosage of the drug, or no drug at all. For such a drug study, the system 20 is suitably an imaging system that performs imaging or other characterization of tumors, lesions, malformations, or other physiological manifestations of the contagion. Over the course of the study, different animals of the matrix that have received different treatments (e.g., different dosages or treatment schedules of the drug under study) are periodically imaged using the imaging system 20 to determine the effect of such different treatments, as evidenced for example by growing or shrinking of the number or size of tumors, lesions, or the like.

The described drug testing application is an example. Another contemplated application is imaging or radiation therapy treatment of a patient having a deficient immune system, who is therefore kept in the isolation region 10 which is in such an application a sterile room. Another contemplated application is imaging or radiation therapy treatment of a patient who has contracted a dangerous infectious contagion, who is therefore kept in the isolation region 10 which is in

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such an application may for example be a BSL-4 isolation room. Other contemplated applications relate to the study or monitoring of toxic chemicals or radioactive substances, study or monitoring of unknown substances or biological entities, or so forth.

To avoid compromising the isolation (e.g., sterility, biological isolation, chemical isolation, or so forth) of the isolation region 10, the subject is loaded into the examination or processing region of the imaging or radiation therapy system 20 through a container sized to receive the subject. In the illustrated example embodiment, the container is a substantially hollow tubular extension 24 of the containment barrier 14 protruding away from the isolation region 10. The substantially hollow tubular extension 24 surrounds an interior volume 26 that includes the examination or processing region of the imaging or radiation therapy system 20. The interior volume 26 is in fluid communication with the isolation region 10 and is in fluid isolation from the imaging or therapy system 20. That is, the interior volume 26 has an airtight seal relative to the imaging or therapy system 20, but is accessible from the isolation region 10 by an opening 30.

The substantially hollow tubular extension 24 is made of a material providing operative communication between the imaging or therapy system 20 and the interior volume 26 of the substantially hollow tubular extension. For example, if the imaging or therapy system 20 includes an MR scanner portion, then at least a portion of the tubular structure 24 disposed in the examination region of the MR scanner portion is suitably non-magnetic so that the interior 26 of the tubular container 24 is in operative communication with the magnetic resonance scanner portion of the imaging system. Similarly, if the imaging or therapy system 20 includes an imaging system portion detecting ionizing radiation (for example, a SPECT or PET system), then at least a portion of the tubular container 24 disposed in an examination region of the imaging system portion detecting ionizing radiation is suitably substantially transmissive for the detected ionizing radiation so that the interior 26 of the tubular container 24 is in operative communication with the imaging system portion detecting ionizing radiation. Similarly, if the imaging or therapy system 20 includes a radiation therapy system portion emitting ionizing radiation, then at least a portion of the tubular container 24 disposed in a processing region of the radiation therapy system portion is suitably substantially transmissive for the emitted ionizing radiation so that the interior 26 of the tubular container 24 is in operative communication with the radiation therapy system portion. As yet another example, if the imaging or therapy system 20 includes an optical camera portion, then at least a portion of the tubular container 24 disposed in a viewing region of the optical camera portion is suitably substantially visually transparent so that the interior 26 of the tubular container 24 is in operative communication with the optical camera portion.

The tubular container 24 acts as a barrier between the subject and the imaging or radiation therapy system 20. For example, if the subject is diseased, then only the interior volume 26 of the tubular container 24 is exposed to the disease, and hence decontamination is suitably applied only to the interior 26 and interior surfaces 26 of the tubular container 24. The tubular container 24 should be durable and capable of containing infectious diseases or other actual or potential contamination (such as chemical contamination in the case of a toxic isolation region, or radioactive contamination in the case of a radioactive isolation region). In the case of a sterile isolation region, the tubular container 24 should be capable of preventing contaminants from entering the sterile contamination region. In the case of a biological, chemical, or radioac-

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tive isolation region 10, the tubular container 24 should also be constructed to withstand decontamination in accordance with the protocols such as BSL-4 or BMBL followed in the isolation region 10. To ensure effective decontamination, the tubular container 24 should be generally free from pockets, creases, or other areas in which contamination materials can build or pool up. The tubular structure should be mechanically able to withstand some level of impact without breaching the containment. For example, in the case of an MR scanner, if a ferrous object is brought within a certain area of the magnet, the object will be pulled toward the bore, resulting in an impact with the tubular structure.

The illustrated container 24 is generally tubular; however, other shapes can be used. A tubular shape that is cylindrical or slightly longitudinally tapered with a circular, elliptical, "D" shaped, or other cross-section advantageously reduces distance between detectors, emitters, or other operative couplings of the imaging or radiation therapy system 20 when the imaging or radiation therapy system 20 employs a generally tubular bore defining the associated examination or processing region. The at least approximate radial symmetry of a tubular container having a circular, elliptical, or "D" shaped cross-section comports effectively with detectors or radiation emitters arranged radially around the subject or arranged to rotate around the subject, and also comports effectively with the generally radial symmetry of a circular or elliptical radio frequency quadrature body coil of an MR scanner. In some embodiments, it is contemplated for the generally tubular container 24 to be sized for a particular subject, and to be changed out for subjects of different sizes. In some contemplated embodiments, the generally tubular container 24 may have some flexibility, for example allowing the tubular container 24 to be flexed with the assistance of mechanical braces disposed outside of the examination or processing region to accommodate smaller subjects. For example, such mechanical braces can compress the tubular container 24 to reduce the tubular diameter. In yet other contemplated embodiments, tubular container diameter is achieved by including a semi-rigid section with an expansion groove having a flexible joint that is held in tension by tension springs or other devices, and allows the semi-rigid section to expand when tension is removed. If flexible material is used to allow tubular container diameter adjustment, it should be selected to tolerate repetitive decontamination.

With continuing reference to FIG. 1, a subject table 34 or other subject-loading mechanism is optionally disposed within the isolation region 10 to facilitate loading of a subject into the generally tubular container 24 for imaging by the imaging system 20. For example, the illustrated subject table 34 includes a movable table or pallet 36 (shown in partially extended position by dotted lines in FIG. 1) for moving a subject into the interior 26 of the tubular container 24 for imaging, and for retracting the subject from the interior 26 back to the isolation region 10 after imaging. The subject table 34 optionally includes an evacuation button or other mechanism for effectuating rapid removal of the specimen from the tubular container 24.

In addition to the illustrated subject table 34, selected other components of the imaging system 20 may be disposed in the isolation region 10, such as one or more local radio frequency coils (an example surface coil 38 being shown in FIG. 1) in the case of an MR scanner portion of the imaging system 20. Alternatively or additionally, one or more whole-body or other types of radio frequency coils may be disposed outside the isolation region 10, for example concentrically within the bore space 22, in the case of an MR scanner portion of the imaging system 20. In some contemplated embodiments,

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remote controls (either wireless or wired using wires passing through the containment barriers of the isolation region 10 via suitable sealed passthroughs) enable personnel within the isolation region 10 to partially or completely operate the imaging or radiation therapy system 20 by remote control from within the isolation region 10. Additionally or alternatively, the imaging or radiation therapy system 20 may be operated directly from within the less isolated or non-isolated region 12.

The tubular or otherwise-shaped container 24 is suitably made of TBD, fiberglass coated with an epoxy gelcoat, or another material selected for its mechanical properties, impermeability to air and contaminants, and optical transparency, radiation transparency, non-magnetic nature, or other characteristics enabling operative communication between the imaging or radiation therapy system 20 and the subject in the interior 26 of the container 24. The container may be primarily made of a material providing operative communication between the imaging or radiation therapy system and the subject, or may be primarily made of a material that does not provide such operative communication and further include one or more sections, such as viewing windows, that provide the operative communication with the imaging or radiation therapy system.

The containment tube optionally further includes one or more access points 39 (shown only in the perspective view of FIG. 2 as an illustrative example) to allow for general access to the specimen within the containment tube without breaking containment. Such access points optionally include a generally flexible and stretchable material 39f, that allows for containment and can tolerate repetitive decontamination. Optionally, the access points 39 are flush with the tube to allow for easy decontamination. The access points 39 optionally include a rigid seal overlay 39s (shown as a hinged element in an open position in example FIG. 2) that protects the flexible portion 39f from inadvertent pressure. The rigid seal 39s optionally also assists in containment. In some contemplated embodiments, such access points 39 include one or more glove box units (not shown) built into the walls of the tubular container 24 to allow indirect handling of the subject while said subject is disposed within the interior volume 26 of the tubular container 24. Such an arrangement advantageously provides convenient manipulation of the subject, but can complicate decontamination procedures.

With reference to FIGS. 2-4, the illustrated tubular container 24 has a "D" shaped cross-section including a flat portion 40 and an elliptical portion 41. The tubular container 24 is mechanically supported continuously or at distributed discrete points (such as by several spaced apart brackets) along the bore 22, and the flat portion 40 serves as a magnet beam, that is, a surface across which the subject (optionally on the movable table or pallet 36) can be moved into and out of the magnet of the MR scanner portion. In other contemplated embodiments, the tubular container may have a circular or elliptical cross-section, and the subject moved into and out of the tubular container using a table or pallet having dovetailed sides configured to conform with the inner surface of the circular or elliptical tube so as to support the table or pallet at the edges. However, the flat bottom 40 of the tubular container 24 provides distributed support that is advantageous for loading and unloading of heavy or bulky subjects. Optionally the end cap can be of a clear material such as polycarbonate that will provide visibility of the subject from the non-isolated region 20.

The tubular container 24 includes an endcap member 42 disposed at the end opposite the access opening 30. The endcap member 42 is either integrally formed with the tubular

container **24**, for example as an integral injection mold or hydroformed component, or is a separate piece that is secured to the tubular container **24** by welding, bonding, mechanical fastening, or so forth. In the latter case the endcap member **42** is suitably either the same material or a different material from the rest of the tubular container **24**. The endcap member **42** provides an airtight seal of the end of the tubular container **24** opposite the access opening **30** to ensure fluid isolation of the interior volume **26** from the less isolated or non-isolated region **12**.

With continuing reference to FIGS. 2-4 and with further reference to FIGS. 5-7 the illustrated tubular container **24** includes an annular flange **44** surrounding the access opening **30**. The annular flange **44** is either integrally formed with the tubular container **24**, for example as an integral injection mold or hydroformed component, or is a separate piece that is secured to the tubular container **24** by welding, bonding, or so forth. In the latter case the annular flange **44** is suitably either the same material or a different material from the rest of the tubular container **24**. The annular flange **44** cooperates with an annular gasket **50** to seal the interface between the containment barrier wall **14** of the isolation region **10** and the tubular container **24**. In some suitable embodiments, the containment gasket **50** is a silicone rubber, molded piece that has an elliptical or "D" shaped connection opening **52** for connection to the elliptical or "D" shaped containment tube **24**, and a circular outer diameter **54** for connection to the containment wall **14**. The gasket **50** also includes a semicircular bubble region **56** that is used to suppress or eliminate vibration transmitted from the containment wall **14** to the containment tube **24** and to accommodate any misalignment of the containment tube **24** with respect to the containment wall **14**. The gasket **50** is easily cleanable, with no sharp corners. The containment gasket **50** is mounted to the annular flange **44** of the tubular container **24** and to the containment wall **14** using compression rings. The illustrated gasket **50** is an example; in other embodiments, other types of gaskets may be used, such as an O-ring seal.

The tubular container **24** can be manufactured in various ways, such as by extrusion, injection molding, hydroforming, or so forth. In one approach, the tubular container **24** is manufactured of wound fiberglass coated with epoxy. For a tubular container of circular cross-section, a suitable mandrel for winding the fiberglass filament is suitably made by forming a rough cylindrical shape out of flat plate, and then turning the part on a lathe. However, for non-circular cross-sections such as elliptical or "D" shaped cross-sections, a lathe is not suitable for shaping the mandrel.

Accordingly, with reference to FIG. 8, a mandrel **60** for winding fiberglass filament to form a tubular container **24** having a "D" shaped or other non-circular cross-section is suitably formed as follows. A plurality of flat, relatively thin plates **62** are generated using vertical milling or another suitable technique. The plates are cut to the desired cross-section, such as the illustrated "D" shaped cross-section having a flat bottom portion **64** and an elliptical portion **65**. Each plate **62** has a width **W** that is substantially thinner than the desired longitudinal length **L** of the mandrel **60** (and hence of the to-be-generated wound tubular container **24**). The plates **62** are pinned, bolted, or otherwise secured together to achieve the needed length **L** of mandrel **60**. A shaft **66** is passed through holes or openings in the plates **62** placed along the centerline of the plates **62** to provide an axis for rotating the mandrel **60** during winding of the fiberglass filament. The plates **62** are optionally of different cross-sectional sizes, and are secured together in an order that imparts to the tubular mandrel **60** a gradual longitudinal cross-section tapering

from one end of the tubular mandrel to the other end of the tubular mandrel along the length **L**. This optional tapering facilitates removal of the wound fiberglass filament structure after curing. The mandrel **60** is suitably polished or sanded to remove any burs or edges after assembly. The fiberglass filament is then wound to define the general shape of the tubular container **24**, the epoxy cured, and the structure removed from the mandrel **60**. Optionally, a Gelcoat or other surface coating or treatment is applied to the interior of the wound fiberglass tubular container to provide a smooth, cleanable surface.

With returning reference to FIG. 1, the tubular container **24** is suitably held in a substantially stationary position within the bore **22** of the imaging or radiation therapy system **20**. In some embodiments, the bracing of the tube at the access end by the annular flange **44** provides sufficient support. However, typically the tubular container **24** is too heavy for single-end bracing, or would undergo unacceptable flexing if supported only at the access end. Moreover, in embodiments such as those of FIGS. 2-4 in which the tubular container **24** includes the flat or otherwise shaped portion **40** configured to serve as a magnet beam or other subject support, the bracing of the tube should be sufficient to support not only the weight of the tube itself but also the weight of the subject and any associated support equipment such as the movable table or pallet **36**. In some embodiments, the annular flange **44** provides some support, and an additional brace **70** disposed in the less isolated or non-isolated region **12** provides support for the tubular container **24** at the end opposite the access end. Optionally, a support **72** is disposed in the bore **22** of the imaging or radiation therapy system **20** between the tubular container **24** and the inner surface of the bore **22**, and supports at least some weight of the tubular container **24** (and optionally its contents) against the bore **22**. The optional support **72** can be in addition to the end-brace **70**, or in place of the end-brace **70**. Advantageously, the brace **72** is under the pallet **36** when the pallet is fully extended, so that the weight of the subject and pallet **72** are transferred through the proximate portion of the tubular container **24** directly to the underlying brace **72** without being distributed over a large unsupported area of the containment tube **24**.

With continuing reference to FIG. 1 and with further reference to FIG. 9, a suitable imaging method is described. In a first operation **80**, a subject is inserted into the opening **30** of the tubular container **24**. If the subject is a live test animal, it may be anesthetized, isolated in a separate soft or hard container, or physically restrained before the insertion **80**. In some embodiments, the subject is placed onto the tabletop or pallet **36** that is then extended into the opening **30**. The insertion **80** may also include other preparatory operations, such as mounting the magnetic resonance surface radio frequency coil **38** near or on the subject. The subject is then moved through the tube **24** in an operation **82** to the examination region of the imaging or radiation therapy system **20**. This can be accomplished, for example, by extending the tabletop or pallet **36** into the tube **24**, or by using a push-pull rod, or so forth. In some embodiments, a fail-safe sensor **84**, such as a limiter switch, is provided at the end of the tubular container **24** to detect if the subject is moved too far into the tube so as to avoid having the subject from impinging upon the endcap **42** and possibly breach containment. Once the subject is positioned in the examination region, the imaging or radiation therapy system **20** is used to perform selected imaging or therapy operations **86**. After imaging or radiation therapy is completed, the subject is withdrawn from the tubular container **24** in an operation **88**, for example by retracting the tabletop or pallet **36**, by using a pulling hook on a push-pull

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rod, or so forth. In some embodiments, a quick-extraction mechanism is provided to enable the subject to be withdrawn from the tubular container **24** quickly in the event of a containment breach or other mishap. For example, the subject table **34** optionally includes an emergency retraction mechanism for rapidly withdrawing the tabletop or pallet **36** from the tube **24**. Optionally, the interior of the tubular container **24** is decontaminated in an operation **90** after the subject is removed. In other embodiments, decontamination is performed less frequently, for example once-a-week.

With reference to FIG. **10**, another embodiment of a tubular container **124** is described, that is suitably substituted for the tubular container **24** in the system of FIG. **1**. The tubular container **124** includes a sturdy tubular main portion **126**, which is typically translucent or opaque respective to the imaging or radiation therapy system **20**, and a transparent window portion **128** through which the imaging or radiation therapy system **20** interacts with the subject. The transparent window portion **128** is suitably sealed at its edges to the main portion **126** by a weld, epoxy bond, or other airtight seal. A lower portion of the tubular container **124** is optionally reinforced, for example, by thickening of the bottom of the sturdy main portion **126**, to provide enhanced structural rigidity and strength.

With reference to FIG. **1**, another embodiment of a tubular container **224** is described, that is suitably substituted for the tubular container **24** in the system of FIG. **1**. The tubular container **224** includes a rigid frame **226** made of annular portions **228** and connecting rods **230**. The rigid frame **226** has substantial gaps between the annular portions **228** and the rods **230**, and hence is not sealed. A sealing sheath **232** conformably surrounds and is supported by the rigid frame **226**.

For an imaging system such as PET, SPECT, CT, or so forth that uses directional radiation, or for a radiation therapy system, the rigid frame **226** can be transparent, translucent, or opaque respective to the radiation while the sealing sheath **232** is transparent. Accordingly, the imaging or therapy system **20** interacts with the subject in the examination region through the sealing sheath **232** at the gaps in the rigid frame **226**, and optionally also through the rigid frame **226** if the frame is transparent or translucent. In the latter case, it is contemplated to weight acquired imaging data based on whether it was acquired through the sealing sheath **232** only (that is, through the gaps in the rigid frame **226**) or through the sheath **232** and rigid frame **226**. If the additional attenuation by the frame **226** is expected to degrade the imaging data, then such weighting advantageously emphasizes the imaging data collected through the gaps which is more reliable.

On the other hand, if the rigid frame **226** is opaque to the directed radiation of the imaging or radiation therapy system **20**, then the angular span of acquired imaging data may have gaps corresponding to the connecting rods **230** through which data are not acquired. To accommodate an opaque frame in such a configuration, it is contemplated to arrange the tubular container **224** with a rotatable connection at the containment wall **14**, so that by rotating the tubular container **224** the angular intervals blocked by the connecting rods **230** can be moved to enable acquiring a full 180° or 360° dataset. The rotatable connection can enable either complete rotation, or partial rotation over a selected angular interval. In another approach for accommodating an opaque frame in the case of certain types of imaging such as SPECT or CT in which projection data acquired at opposing 180° positions are nominally identical, the angular spacing of the connecting rods **230** can be selected so that complementary angular data **1800** away from a connecting rod is always available. For example,

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if five rods are positioned at 0°, 72°, 144°, 216°, and 288°, then complementary projection data at 180°, 252°, 324°, 36°, and 108° are available.

With reference to FIG. **12**, another embodiment of a tubular container **324** is described, that is suitably substituted for the tubular container **24** in the system of FIG. **1**. The tubular container **324** includes a flexible generally tubular containment bag **326** having an open end sealed to the containment wall **14** separating the isolation region **10** and the less isolated or non-isolated region **12** by the annular flange **44**. The flexible containment bag **326** is supported in an expanded configuration by overhead suspenders **328** connected to the ceiling **16** and by lower anchors **330** extending from the floor **17**. Optionally, the connections of the suspenders **328** and anchors **330** are detachable so that the flexible containment bag **326** can be rolled up against the wall **14** when not in use, thus freeing up substantial space in the isolated or non-isolated region **12** for other uses. In some embodiments, it is contemplated for the generally tubular containment bag to be made of an elastic material such that the bag “springs back” against the wall **14** when released from the suspenders **328** and anchors **330**.

With reference to FIG. **13**, optionally further measures are taken in the less isolated or non-isolated region **12** to ensure that there is no breach of containment via the tubular container **24**. In the illustrated example of FIG. **13**, a containment jacket **400** (shown in phantom by dashed lines in FIG. **13**) is disposed around the tubular container **24**. The containment jacket **400** can be a permanent secondary sealed container to provide double containment, or can be an unsealed container that reduces the likelihood of a breach of the inner tubular container **24** causing contamination of the less isolated or non-isolated region **12**. In some embodiments, the containment jacket **400** is not a permanent structure, but rather is a bag or sleeve that can be disposed over the tubular container **24** in an emergency to help seal a breach of the tubular container **24**. For example, the containment jacket **400** can be a flexible bag with a sealable end secured to the containment wall **14** on the side of the less isolated or non-isolated region **12**, so that it can be extended away from the wall **14** and over the tubular container **24** in the event of an emergency. In another contemplated embodiment, the containment jacket **400** is optionally a clamshell jacket or other automated outer enclosure that activates in the event that an air sensor or other sensor detects a breach of the tubular container **24**. In some embodiments, an air flow or partial vacuum is maintained inside the containment jacket **400** to provide flushing or negative differential pressure to help keep contaminants out of the less isolated or non-isolated region **12** in the event of a breach of the container **24**. Other contemplated options for limiting the adverse effects of a breach of containment include providing an airtight shutter at the opening **30**. The additional containment jacket **400** is optional, and is suitably omitted if the tubular container **24** is expected to provide sufficient containment, or if the isolation region **10** is a moderate risk region, such as a biological laboratory maintained at a level less than BSL-4.

In some environments, the tubular container **24** with its opening **30** providing fluid communication with the isolation region **10** may be undesirable. To provide still further containment, it is contemplated to omit the opening **30** and instead configure the container as a wholly sealed unit that is physically transported from the isolation region **10** to the less isolated region **12** through a suitable airlock or other containment mechanism.

With reference to FIG. **14**, a tubular container **500** is sized to receive a human subject, and is self-contained when a

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loading opening at one end is sealed by a removable end cap **502**. The opposite end includes a permanent end cap **503**; alternatively, two removable end caps can be provided. The removable end cap **502** is sealed to the remainder of the container **500** by an airtight seal formed by welding, bonding, or so forth. Because welding or bonding can be uncomfortable and disturbing to the patient, in some embodiments the end cap **502** is sealed using a gasket, such as a gasket similar to the gasket **50** used to connect the containment tube **24** to the containment wall **14** in the embodiments of FIGS. 1-7. In some example embodiments, the removable end cap **502** may be a one-time use end cap that is welded or otherwise sealed to the container **500** in such a way that when it is subsequently removed it cannot be reused. In some other example embodiments, the end cap is reusable, and is sealed to the container **500** using a copper gasket (not shown) and sealing bolts similar to the type of metal gasket seal used in connecting to a flange of a high vacuum system. The tubular container **500** also preferably includes sealed windows **504** to enable the human subject to see out so as to reduce a likelihood of claustrophobia, and to enable personnel to visually monitor the human subject from outside the sealed container **500**.

With reference to FIG. 14, the container **500** is initially disposed on a table **506** or other secure positioning in the isolation region **10**, and is loaded with the human subject while disposed in the isolation region **10**. The end cap **502** (shown detached in FIG. 14) is sealed to the container **500** after the human subject is loaded. Although not illustrated, when the container **500** is sealed by the end cap **502** the human subject is provided with a supply of breathable air, either through a sealed air feed through passing into the container **500** or by providing an self-contained breathing apparatus within the container **500**. (If the human subject is a cadaver, as may be the case for example in a post-mortem analysis of a victim of an unknown disease, then the breathable air supply is suitably omitted).

With reference to FIG. 15, once the container **500** is sealed with the human subject inside, it is transferred from the isolation region **10** to the less isolated or non-isolated region **12** via one or more airlocks **508** (diagrammatically shown in FIGS. 15 and 16) or other suitable isolation mechanisms disposed between the isolation region **10** and the less isolated or non-isolated region **12**. The outside of the sealed container **500** is decontaminated before entry into the less isolated or non-isolated region **12**. In one suitable approach, initial decontamination is performed after sealing of the end cap **502** while the sealed container **500** is still in the isolation region **10**, followed by more thorough or repeated decontamination of the sealed container **500** performed in the airlock room or compartment **508** passing out of the isolation region **10**. Once the sealed and externally decontaminated container **500** is moved into the less isolated or non-isolated region **12**, the container **500** is suitably sized and shaped for insertion into the bore **22** of the imaging or radiation therapy system **20**. For example, the illustrated cylindrical container **500** conformably slides into the cylindrical bore **22** of the imaging or radiation therapy system **20** so that it is stably and rigidly fixed positioned inside the bore **22**. Alternatively, the container can include anchor points for braces, clamps, or other securing devices for securing the container in the bore or other examination region of the imaging or radiation therapy system. Imaging or radiation therapy is performed on the human subject while in the bore **22**. Afterward, the container **500** is transferred back to the isolation region **10** via the airlock room or compartment **508** (without decontamination in this case), and the sealed end cap **502** is unsealed and removed to allow removal of the human subject.

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The invention has been described with reference to the preferred embodiments. Modifications and alterations may occur to others upon reading and understanding the preceding detailed description. It is intended that the invention be constructed as including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.

Having thus described the preferred embodiments, the invention is now claimed to be:

1. A system for imaging or treating a subject disposed in an isolation region, the system comprising:

an imaging or therapy system disposed outside of and isolated from the isolation region and defining an examination region; and

a hollow tubular member overlapping the examination region, the hollow tubular member having a sealed end distal from the isolation region and an open end in fluid communication with the isolation region, the hollow tubular member and the open end being sized to admit the subject into the examination region, the hollow tubular member being supported outside of the isolation region, the hollow tubular member having a lower support region that is supporting the admitted subject in the examination region.

2. The system as set forth in claim 1, wherein the hollow tubular member has a "D"-shaped cross-section with said lower support region comprising a substantially flat region and the system further comprises:

a table or pallet disposed inside the hollow tubular member, wherein the substantially flat region of the hollow tubular member having the "D"-shaped cross-section is supporting the admitted subject disposed on the table or pallet in the examination region.

3. The subject loading system as set forth in claim 2, wherein the "D" shaped cross-section of the hollow tubular member further includes an elliptical or circular cross-section portion.

4. The system as set forth in claim 1, wherein the imaging or therapy system includes a magnetic resonance scanner, the examination region includes a bore of the magnetic resonance scanner, and the hollow tubular member is arranged substantially coaxially inside the bore of the magnetic resonance scanner.

5. The system as set forth in claim 4, wherein the hollow tubular member has a "D"-shaped cross-section with said lower support region comprising a substantially flat region defining a magnet beam supporting the admitted subject in the bore of the magnetic resonance scanner.

6. The system as set forth in claim 1, wherein the imaging or therapy system defines a confined bore surrounding the examination region, and the hollow tubular member is arranged substantially coaxially inside the bore.

7. The system as set forth in claim 6, further comprising: one or more braces disposed in the bore of the imaging or therapy system and at least contributing to supporting the hollow tubular member outside of the isolation region.

8. A system for imaging or treating a subject disposed in an isolation region, the system comprising:

an imaging or therapy system disposed outside of and isolated from the isolation region and defining an examination region;

a hollow tubular member overlapping the examination region, the hollow tubular member having a sealed end distal from the isolation region and an open end in fluid communication with the isolation region, the hollow tubular member and the open end sized to admit the

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subject into the examination region, the hollow tubular member being supported outside of the isolation region so as to support the admitted subject in the examination region; and

a table or pallet on which the subject is disposed, the table or pallet being movable into the hollow tubular member and having a surface or plurality of surfaces engaging the hollow tubular member and configured to comport with a configuration of the hollow tubular member so as to support the subject in the hollow tubular member.

9. The system as set forth in claim 1, wherein the hollow tubular member comprises:

wound fiberglass filament defining the tubular member.

10. The system as set forth in claim 9, wherein the hollow tubular member has a longitudinally tapering cross-section.

11. The system as set forth in claim 1, further comprising:

an annular flange surrounding and secured with the open end of the hollow tubular member, the annular flange having an inner annular edge connecting with the open end of the hollow tubular member and a larger outer annular edge; and

an annular sealing member separate from the annular flange and providing an airtight seal between the annular flange and a containment barrier of the isolation region, the containment barrier including an opening communicating with the open end of the tubular member.

12. The system as set forth in claim 1, wherein the imaging or therapy system detects ionizing radiation, and at least a portion of the hollow tubular member overlapping the examination region is substantially transmissive for the detected ionizing radiation.

13. The system as set forth in claim 1, wherein the hollow tubular member is rotatably connected to a containment barrier of the isolation region to enable partial or full rotation of the hollow tubular member respective to the containment barrier.

14. A system for imaging or treating a subject disposed in an isolation region, the system comprising:

a wall bounding the isolation region, the wall having a wall opening sized to receive a human subject;

an imaging or therapy system disposed on a side of the wall opposite the isolation region and isolated from the isolation region, the imaging or therapy system having a bore surrounding an examination region;

a hollow tubular member having an open end proximate to the wall, the hollow tubular member extending into the bore of the imaging or therapy system and overlapping the examination region, the hollow tubular member having a sealed end distal from the wall, the open end of the hollow tubular member being aligned with the wall opening of the wall bounding the isolation region, the hollow tubular member being sized to admit a human subject from the isolation region into the hollow tubular member through the wall opening and through the open end of the hollow tubular member;

an annular flange surrounding the open end of the hollow tubular member, the annular flange being integral with the hollow tubular member or secured with the hollow tubular member by welding or bonding; and

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an annular sealing member compressed between the annular flange and the wall bounding the isolation region to provide an airtight seal between the tubular member and the wall bounding the isolation region so as to maintain fluid isolation of the imaging or therapy system from the isolation region including an interior of the hollow tubular member.

15. The system as set forth in claim 14, wherein the annular sealing member comprises an annular gasket.

16. The system as set forth in claim 15, wherein the annular gasket includes a vibration-dampening bubble portion.

17. The system as set forth in claim 16, wherein the annular sealing member comprises a silicone rubber annular gasket.

18. The system as set forth in claim 14, wherein the hollow tubular member comprises epoxy coated wound fiberglass.

19. The system as set forth in claim 14, further comprising:

one or more braces supporting the hollow tubular member; and

a table or pallet movable into the hollow tubular member with a human subject supported on the table or pallet, the table or pallet configured to rest upon the hollow tubular member wherein the hollow tubular member is braced to support the table or pallet when moved into the hollow tubular member with a human subject disposed on the table or pallet.

20. The system as set forth in claim 14, wherein:

the imaging or therapy system disposed on the side of the wall opposite the isolation region is isolated from the isolation region in accordance with Biological Safety Level 4 (BSL-4); and

the annular sealing member compressed between the annular flange and the wall bounding the isolation region provides an airtight seal between the tubular member and the wall bounding the isolation region so as to maintain isolation of the imaging or therapy system from the isolation region including an interior of the hollow tubular member in accordance with BSL-4.

21. The system as set forth in claim 11, wherein the sealed end of the hollow tubular member and the annular flange and annular sealing member provide isolation between the isolation region and the examination region that is compliant with Biological Safety Level 4 (BSL-4).

22. The system as set forth in claim 8, wherein the surface or plurality of surfaces of the table or pallet comprise a flat bottom surface configured to rest on a flat portion of the hollow tubular member, the hollow tubular member having a "D" shaped cross-section.

23. The system as set forth in claim 8, wherein the surface or plurality of surfaces of the table or pallet comprise dovetailed sides configured to conform with an inner surface of the hollow tubular member so as to support the table or pallet at the edges, the hollow tubular member having a circular or elliptical cross-section.

24. The system as set forth in claim 19, wherein the hollow tubular member has a "D"-shaped cross-section with a substantially flat region upon which the table or pallet rests when the table or pallet is moved into the hollow tubular member with a human subject disposed on the table or pallet.

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